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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 001022

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION, MARCH 21: WAR IN IRAQ; POST-SADDAM IRAQ; MISSILE ATTACKS ON KUWAIT

1. SUMMARY: Kuwaiti commentators who have viewed the end of Saddam's regime as a fait accompli for months look in greater detail at issues in post-Saddam Iraq. Pushing aside any thought of generous gestures, one writer states that Kuwait should not waive the financial compensation it has coming from Iraq as it demands the return of its POWs and National Archives. The writer also calls for the implementation of an "Iraqi educational curricula that includes Iraqi recognition of the State of Kuwait."

In a striking departure from the pervasive Sunni perspective on Kuwait's editorial pages, a Shia'a columnist with "Al Watan" discusses the liberal tradition of thought associated with the Shia'a religious center in the Iraqi city of Najaf, and suggests that the US should support this school as a counterbalance to the highly politicized, conservative religious interpretations emanating from Iran "if America wants liberal government in Iraq."

One commentator expresses concern that some US-supported Iraqi dissidents "have good relations with the Zionist lobbies." Another sees "the true goal" of the US as the domination and exploitation of Iraq.

Prompted by reports of bread shortages and stockpiling by residents, one writer urges people to remain calm and confident. On the news pages, the Kuwaiti Stock Exchange has suspended trading, and the Kuwait phone system suffered outages in the wake of missile attacks on Kuwait on March 20 due to the volume of calls. END SUMMARY.

2. News Stories: Kuwait television carries statement by Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense that Kuwait's armed forces have shot down two Iraqi Scud missiles launched against Kuwait.

All newspapers are carrying comments by the Dean of Kuwait University's College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, Dr. Mohammed Al-Tabtabaie, that the Kuwaiti military and their fellow Muslims are fighting on the "path of Allah," and their aim is to defend against the aggression of the "tyrannical Iraqi regime's army."

On the front page of Al-Qabas, Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed received a phone call from President Bush to thank him for Kuwait's support and to update him on the latest developments in the region.

Al-Watan's front page carries a report that Kuwaiti troops apprehended an Iraqi family that fled to Kuwait by boat, and handed them over to American forces.

Sales at local cooperatives (grocery stores) on March 20 were three times what they were on the previously record day, March 17, President Bush's ultimatum to Saddam's regime, Al Watan reports.

In an interview with Al-Watan, Retired former Chief-of-Staff General Ali Al-Moumen, Director of the Humanitarian Aid Operations Center in Kuwait, announced that refugee camps will be set-up in southern Iraq, but not in Kuwait.

All newspapers report that the Kuwaiti communications network suffered a series of outages on March 20 when the mobile network and international lines were swamped.

Military sources confirmed to Al-Watan that Iraqi civilians are already fleeing towards the Kuwaiti border and that members of the Iraqi military are hiding among them.

According to Al-Anba, Ministry of Defense spokesman Colonel Yousef Al-Mulla denied there were any clashes between Kuwaiti and Iraqi troops on March 20.

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports on its front page that the Director General of the Kuwait Stock Exchange (KSE) announced that all KSE transactions will be halted until further notice.

Al-Rai Al-Aam and Al-Seyassa dailies report that liberal MP Ahmed Al-Rubie, in an interview with Saudi Okaz newspaper, warned that "sleeper cells" in Kuwait are waiting for the "zero hour" of a full-scale US attack in Iraq to execute sabotage activities in Kuwait.

Editorials:

13. "Our Interest First"

Opening editorial for independent Al-Anba (3/21): "We have to take into consideration Kuwait and Kuwait's interests in the post-Saddam era. [These] interests can be summarized in six points: 1) Any elected Iraqi Council must first apologize to Kuwait for the occupation of Kuwait in 1990; 2) This Iraqi Council must formalize written recognition of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border; 3) The transitional Iraqi government must provide full support in searching for POWs, under UN supervision; 4) The transitional Iraqi government must return the Kuwaiti National Archive; 5) The transitional Iraqi government must commit itself to compensation to Kuwait for damage due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; 6) The UN must be involved in formulating the Iraqi educational curricula which should include Iraqi recognition in the State of Kuwait. We Kuwaitis must demand that our government. not adopt the slogan, 'let bygones be bygones.'"

14. "The Republic of Drought and Graveyards"

Fouad Al-Hashem in independent Al-Watan (3/21): "[Kuwait] completed a project for a water pipeline which runs from one of the water desalination stations in Kuwait to our Iraqi brothers who live only a few meters away from the Shatt Al-Arab river in Umm Qasr. This is the same river from which we brought fresh water to Kuwait [more than a century ago], but because of Saddam's tampering with the Iraqi marshes, the level of the river dropped and became saline. Mr. President [Bush], can you or the Arabs, believe that Kuwait, a dry country, would give water to the Iraqi people? . We and the Iraqis are the victims of one person and we were saved by one man and his son, so thank you very much."

15. "Saddam and the Third Picture"

Awad Al-Mutairi wrote in independent Al-Qabas (3/21): "After few days, Saddam will be gone-- either killed or defeated. Saddam will be remembered as a person who only loved himself, and who suffered from an ego complex. Throughout his leadership in Iraq, he attempted to make himself a historical figure. He presented himself to the world as a knight and an intellectual, but he was not successful in presenting both of these images. Therefore, we advise Saddam to leave Iraq and to apologize to the Arab nations and the Iraqis for all the crimes he has committed against them."

16. "Without the Last Mulberry Leaf"

Dr. Yasser Al-Saleh wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-Aam (3/21): "It is very obvious that the American administration has lost credibility among the people of the world. The problem of the American administration and Prime Minister Blair is that their goal for the war on Iraq has no ethical justification. because they failed to get UN approval. They failed to prevent the media from revealing their true goals, and their suspicious connections with the Iraqi regime, oil companies and international contractors."

17. "Why the Need to Stockpile Food Supplies?"

Ali Al-Mahdai wrote in independent Al-Watan (3/21): "What need is there to stock food supplies and water? There is no need to do so. Kuwait today is different than Kuwait in 1990 when we were invaded by Iraq. Food supplies, water and other consumable products are available and plenty for all the people and the expatriates. There is no need to panic at this difficult time. We should also not heed any rumors, which are aimed at sowing sedition in our society because our country is protected. Let the people of Kuwait be assured that Kuwait is safe and there is no need to fear anything."

18. "The Dangers of the Next Stage in Iraq"

Basil Al-Naqeeb wrote in independent Al-Watan (3/21): "What is really worrying us is the US support for some Iraqi opposition who are only concerned about the removal of Saddam. For example, there is the Iraqi oppositionist Ahmad Al-Jallbi who says he has visited Israel on many occasions, and that he has good relations with the Zionist lobbies. We have to realize that people like Al-Jallbi were the ones who supported the Kurds to be separated from Iraq. They are people who have no problems with extorting the Gulf countries to reach a balance in the region. If we keep silent about them, the US will take our silence as acceptance. Therefore, there is the chance for Arab countries to express their opinions before a new government is formed."

19. "Washington Between the Hoza in Najaf and the Hoza in Qum" [A "hoza" is a Shiite scholarly center]

Shiite Fakher Al-Sultan wrote in independent Al-Watan (3/21): "We believe that after the toppling of Saddam, the US will strengthen and enforce its relations with the religious scientific centers in Najaf in Iraq in order to support the non-political religious movements. In its goal to change the region, Washington will work hard to implement their liberal project by separating religion from politics. It is a project consistent with the ideology adopted by the religious scientific centers in Najaf in Iraq, which support the toppling of Saddam and the establishment of a liberal government in Iraq. Moreover, the religious scientific centers in Najaf will not object to any influence that will weaken their [more conservative ideological] competitors in the religious scientific centers in Qum [in Iran]. Therefore, if Washington wants a liberal government in Iraq it has to support this ideology which separates religion from politics, and which exists in the religious scientific centers in Najaf."

JONES